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Disputes Review'd :

I N A

S E R M O N

Preach'd at the

Evening Lecture

A T

SALTERS HALL,

O N

LORD'S DAY, *July 23.* 1710.

By MATTHEW HENRY,
Minister of the Gospel. *—*

*Publiſh'd (with ſome Enlargement) at the
Requeſt of divers that heard it.*

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M A R K IX. † 33.

— *What was it that ye disputed among your selves by the way ?*

O U R Lord Jesus is here calling his Disciples to an Account about a warm Debate they happen'd to have among themselves, as they travell'd along, on a Question often started, but not yet determin'd, Which of them should be the greatest ? They thought no other but that their Master should first enter upon the Possession of a temporal Kingdom, and all the Pomp and Grandeur of it, so that they should be prefer'd with him ; But they could not agree who should be *prime Minister of State*, and have the first Post of Honour. This is a sad Instance of the Remainders of Corruption in the Hearts even of good People ; and shews that Pride, Ambition, and Affectation of world-Honour, are Sins that do most easily beset even Christ's own Disciples, which, therefore, we should all carefully watch and strive against. Probably our Lord Jesus over-heard some Words that pass'd in this Dispute ; for those that are hot on an Argument are apt to speak louder than be-

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Psal. 139. 4.

Heb. 4. 12, 13.

Rev. 2. 19, 23.

becomes them ; and when the *Temper* is not within *due Bounds*, commonly the *Voice* is. But whether he *over-heard* them or no, he *very well* what they had been talking of, and *every Word* that had been *said*, and (which more than any Man could know) from Principle it was *said*, and what more they *have said*; for as there is not a *Word* in *Tongue*, so there is not a *Thought* in our *Heart*, tho' newly *risen* and *start'd* there, tho' indolently *suppress'd* and *stifl'd* there, but he *knows* *altogether*. He is that *Essential Eternal Word*. God, who is a *Discerner* of the *Thoughts* and *intent* of the *Heart*, and before whom all things are *naked and open*. Let all the *Churches* take heed of this, that our Lord *Jesus* not only *knows* our *Work*, but is *he* which *searcheth* the *Reins* and *Hearts*.

And yet tho' *Christ* *knew* what his *Disciples* had been talking of, he *ask'd* them what it was, because he would *know* it from them, and would have them to *confess* their *Fault* and *Folly* in that from thence he might take occasion to *reprove* their *Mistakes*, and to *instruct* and *reason* into a better *Temper*.

Think not that my *Design* from this *Text* to *arraign*, *examine*, or *enquire* into any *Dispute* or *Contests* that may be among you, of any *Kind*, for as (blessed be God) I know of no *particular* Occasion for it, nor have any thing else in my *Eye*, in the *Choice* of this *Subject*, but what is *common* to all, so if there were, I should think myself the *unfittest* Man in the *World* to *judge* or a *Divider*. And besides if I should go about to take my *Master's Work* out of my *Hands*, I should contradict that which is my *Design* in putting this *Question* to you, *What is that ye disputed among your selves by the way?* that is to shew you that our Lord *Jesus* doth *will enquire* into these *Matters*, and to bind us over to his *Judgment*.

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Four Things this Text teacheth us, who are all in Profession Disciples of Christ, as we are baptized Christians.

I. That we must all expect to be called to an Account by our Lord Jesus.

II. That we must in a particular Manner be call'd to an Account about our Discourses among ourselves.

III. That among our Discourses we shall especially be call'd to an Account about our Disputes.

IV. That of all our Disputes we shall be most strictly reckon'd with for our Disputes about Precedency and Superiority.

For the First, We must all expect to be call'd to an Account shortly, by our Lord Jesus, concerning the Temper of our Minds, and the Course and Tenor of our Lives, now we are in the Way.

I. We are all now in the Way, following Christ, as his Disciples here, in Consort; we are Viatores, Travellers, under the Conduct of our Great Master, towards the better Country; And here we are upon our Trial; 'Tis the State of our Probation; and according as our Steps are, while we are in the Way, our Rest will be when we are at our Journey's End. It concerns us therefore, what we have to do, to do it while we are yet in the Way, and whatever we do while we are in the Way, to do it with an Eye to our End.

2. There will be a Review of what passeth in the Way; 'twill all be call'd over again, every Work and every Word will be brought into Judgment, will be weigh'd in a just and unerring Balance, will be produc'd in Evidence for us or against us. There will not need any Repetition, every thing is now recorded in the Book of God's Omniscience, and it is enough that in that Day the Books will be open'd, and all will be judg'd out of those things which were found written in the Books, according to their Works. It concerns us therefore whatever we

Phil. 4. 17.

we do in the *Way*, to do it as those that *must give Account*, and to consider how it will pass in the *Account*; how it will look in the *Review*; that we may dread doing that which will make against us then, and may abound in that which will be *Fruit abounding to our Account*, and which we shall meet again with Comfort, on t'other Side Death and the Grave.

Isa. 33. 22.

John 5. 22.

Acts 17. 31.

3. The *Account* in the great Day must be given up to our Lord Jesus, for we call him *Master and Lord*, as these Disciples did, and to him therefore we are accountable, as *Scholars and Servants*, how we spend our Time. He is our *Judge*, for he is our *Law-giver*, and to him the Father has committed all *Judgment*, particularly that in which he will judge the *World in Righteousness* by that *Man whom he has ordain'd*. Christ shall have the *Honour of it*, and let all good Christians take the *Comfort of it*, that he who is an *Advocate* for all Believers will be their *Judge*; But withal let it oblige us to the utmost Care and Circumspection in our *Walking*: We must therefore labour to be accepted of the Lord, and approve ourselves to him in our Integrity, because we shall all appear before the *Judgment Seat of Christ*, to give *Account* of every thing done in the *Body*. God made the *World* by his Son, and by him as the fittest Person he will judge the *World*.

2 Cor. 5. 9, 10.

Now this is a good Reason,

1. *Why we should judge ourselves, and prove our own Work, and see that our Matters be right and good against that Day.* Let us examine our selves concerning our *Spiritual State*, that we may make sure *Work for our own Souls*, and often call ourselves to an *Account* concerning the *Way* we are in, and the *Steps* we take in that *Way*, that we may renew our *Repentance*, for what ever we find to have been amiss, and make our Peace with God in Christ. And if we would thus judge our selves, we should not be judged of the

1 Cor. 11. 28, 31.

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Lord. When we come to our Journey's End, it will be ask'd, How we carried our selves in the Way? Let us therefore carry our selves accordingly, and *Ponder the Path of our Feet.*

2. 'Tis a good Reason *why we should not judge one another*, or be severe in our Censures one of another: we thereby *invade* Christ's Throne, for it is his Prerogative to *call* his Disciples to an Account; and tho' he design'd them to be one another's *Helpers*, he never intended they should be one anothers *Judges*. We must all stand before the *Judgment Seat of Christ*, and therefore must not judge one another. We must be *judged* our selves, and may expect to be judg'd with Severity, if we be severe in judging our Brethren, for the Measure we mete will be *measur'd* to us. Our Bre- Mat. 7. 1, 2.
thren likewise must be *judged* by the Lord Jesus, and therefore if we pretend to judge them, they are *coram non judice*. Who are we that we should Rom. 14. 4,
judge another Man's Servant? to his own Master he 12, 14.
stands or falls, and to his Judgment 'tis fit we should leave him.

For the Second. Among other things that pass in the Way, we must expect to be call'd to Account for *what we have talk'd among ourselves*. We are apt to make a *light Matter* of this, and when we have talk'd at *Random*, what comes uppermost, without Regard to God or Man, we think to turn it off with an Excuse that it was but *Talk*, and *Words are but Wind*; But we wretchedly mistake and put a *Cheat* upon ourselves, if that be true which our Saviour has told us, and undoubtedly true it is, that not only for every profane and wicked Word, for every false and spiteful Word, but for every idle Word that Men speak, they must give Account in the Day of Judgment; Nay, and so shall their Doom be, for by thy Mat. 12. 36,
Words thou shalt be justified, and by thy Words thou shalt be condemn'd. Christ takes Notice of what we say now, and we should think we hear him say

Luke 24. 17. say to us when we are in Conversation, as he did to the two Disciples going to Emmaus, What manner of Communicattons are these that ye have one another, as ye walk and are sad, or as ye sit and are merry? Are they such as becomes Christians? Are you not saying that which must be unsaid again by Repentance, or you'll be undone? And as Christ takes notice of it now, so he will call it over again in the Day of Account.

What we talk among our selves with the use of Freedom of Conversation, we do not expect to be heard of again; it is *inter nos*, and therefore we think we may allow our selves a Liberty. What is said under the Seal of Conversation, we think almost as safe in point of Honour, as what is said under the Seal of Confession: None but a Tale-bearer, that great Mischief-maker, will reveal such Secrets: But tho' it be talk'd among our selves, it cannot escape either the Cognizance or the Judgment of our Lord Jesus.

Eph. 4. 29. 1. If we talk any thing that is good, among our selves, and that is to the use of edifying, which manifests Grace in the Speaker, and ministereth Grace to the Hearers, Christ takes notice of it, and we shall hear of it again to our comfort, that Day, when those who thus confess Christ before Men shall be own'd by him before his Father and the Holy Angels. When they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, for their mutual Encouragement to hold fast their Integrity in time of general Apostasy, the Lord bearkned and heard it, as one greatly well pleas'd with it, and a Book of Remembrance was written before him, in which were enter'd all those pious Conferences of them that feared the Lord, and thought upon his Name; and the Day will come when this Book shall be open'd.

Mal. 3. 16. There is not a good Word coming from a good Heart, and directed to a good end, but it is heard in Secret, and shall be rewarded openly, tho' perhaps the

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are those now who ridicule and banter such language: What is spoken for the Edification of others will turn to a good account to *our selves*; it will add to our Joy in Heaven to have in any way instrumental to help others thither. If it should not reach their *Hearts* for whom it is design'd, yet the Comfort of it will return to our own *Bosoms*; and what was well intended to the Honour of Christ, shall not be overlook'd the Day of Account.

This should engage and encourage us to keep religious Discourse, that it will be remember'd to our Advantage in the Account shortly, tho' we may forget it; as the *Righteous* could not say that they saw Christ hungry and fed him, or thirsty Mat. 25. 37! gave him Drink, yet Christ will not forget it, and will place it to account, as an acceptable Service done to him.

If we talk any thing that's ill among our selves, if any corrupt Communication proceeds out of our Mouths, dictated by the Corruption of our Minds, and which has a tendency to corrupt the Minds and Manners of others, Christ observes that too, is displeased with it, and we shall be brought to it again, either by the Checks of our own Consciences, in order to our Repentance, or in the Day of the Revelation of the Righteous Judgment of God, when according even to *Enoch's Prophecy*, the Lord shall come to reckon with Sinners Jude 15.

not only for all their ungodly Deeds, but for all their hard Speeches, spoken against him. It will be ask'd sooner or later, What was it that you did such a time, proudly, vainly, filthily, that foolish Talking and Jestings which is not becoming? What was it that you talk'd in such and such Company by way of Reproach to your Neighbour, when you sate deliberately, sate matterially, and spoke against your Brother, and consider'd those, whose good Names you ought to be protected? Or, which aggravates it, by way

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- Exod. 22. 28. way of Reflection on your Superiors, *reviling Gods, and speaking evil of the Rulers of your People*
- Eccl. 10. 20. little thinking that a *Bird of the Air may carry Voice*? Let this Consideration oblige us all
- Psal. 39. 1. *take heed to our Ways, that we offend not with Tongue, and to keep our Mouth as it were with Bridle, that we may say nothing but what can bear to be told of again.* And we have need to beg of God, that by his Grace he would send
- Psal. 141. 3. *Watch before the Door of our Lips, a double Watch upon the Door of our Hearts, out of the abundance of which the Mouth speaks, that nothing may proceed from them to his Dishonour.*

For the Third, As other our Discourses among ourselves by the Way, so especially our Disputes will be call'd over again, and we shall be call'd to account about them. What was it that ye disputed among your selves? What was the Subject of the Dispute? and how was it manag'd? Disputing supposeth some Variance and Strife, and mutual Contradiction and Opposition arising from it. Disputing by the Way is falling out by the Way, a thing directly contrary to the Charge which Joseph as a Type of Christ gave to his Brethren, See that ye fall not out by the Way; and therefore we may expect to be reprov'd for it.

- Gen. 45. 24. There are Disputes that are of use among Disciples of Christ, and which in the Review may reflect upon with Comfort. Did we dispute for the Conviction of Atheists and Deists, and other the Enemies of our Holy Religion, or for the Confirmation of those that were in danger of being drawn away by their Delusions? Did we
- Jude 3. *contend earnestly for the Faith once deliver'd to the Saints, and with Meekness and Fear both instruct*
- 2 Tim. 2. 25. *others that oppos'd themselves, and give a Reason*
- 1 Pet. 3. 15. *our own Hope that is in us? Did we fairly and calmly discourse lesser Matters in difference between us and our Brethren, that we might find out the Truth, and have our Mistakes rectified; or*

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cannot hereby come to be of the same Mind, we may see that even those we differ from have so much Colour of Reason on their side, as that they may still differ from us, and yet not lose their Reputation either for Wisdom or Integrity? Did we with *Prudence and Mildness* state our Cause with our Neighbour himself, and not Prov. 25. 8, *go forth hastily to strive, and tell him his Fault* before we tell it to the Mat. 18. 15. *world or the Church*, in order to a friendly Accommodation; these are Disputes which will pass well in the Account, when they come to be call'd in again.

But our Disputes are too often such, as that when we come to be ask'd about them, as the Disciples were here, we shall like them *hold our peace*, as being asham'd to have them spoken of again, and having nothing to say in our own vindication; And (as the Town-clark of *Ephesus* call'd) when we are call'd in question for the Up- Acts 19. 40. *or*, can shew no justifiable Cause, whereby we may give an account of it.

Three things may occasion Disputes among Christians, among Ministers, Neighbours, Friends, Relations, which perhaps when they come to be reflected upon as here, will be found to have a great deal in them that was culpable, different Opinions, separate Interests, and clashing Humours.

I. Disputes commonly arise from *Differences of Opinion*, either in Religion and Divine things, about which oftentimes the Disputes and Contentments are most violent) or in Philosophy, Politicks, or other Parts of Learning, or in the Conduct of Human Life. While Men differ so much in Capacity, Temper, Genius and Education, and different Sentiments are receiv'd by Tradition from our Fathers, it cannot be expected that Men should all agree in the same Notions. The same thing seen with different Eyes, and by different

Job 11. 12.

Lights, may appear to one true and very good, and to another false and very bad, tho' both employ their Faculties about it with equal Diligence and Sincerity. This cannot but give rise to Disputes, for we are naturally forward (and sometimes over-forward) to clear our selves, and to convince others, and have such a Conceit of our Judgment, as to think that every body ought to be of our Mind, and that if they will be ruled by Reason, they will be so; for vain Man would be thought to be so, tho' he be as the wild Asses Colt.

But these Disputes are often such as we justly be ashamed of, when we come to look upon them.

(1.) Upon account of the Matter of the Dispute. What was it that we disputed among our selves? What was it we were so hot and eager about?

Deut. 29. 29.

Perhaps it was something above us, about the Nature and Attributes, the Counsels and Decrees of God, and the Operations of his Providence, Grace, and the Person of the Mediator, those

1 Pet. 1. 12.

secret things which belong not to us; things which we did not understand, nor could; things which were Presumption for us to dispute about, for Angels with an awful Reverence humbly desire

2 Cor. 12. 4.

to look into them, as not pretending to be Masters of them: And the Great Apostle, who had been in the third Heavens, not only own'd that

Rom. 11. 33.

Words he heard there were unspeakable, but was so much at a loss to express himself concerning the Work of Redemption, tho' it is in some measure reveal'd, that despairing to find the Bottom, he sits down at the Brink, and adores the De-

Job 42. 3, 6.

of that Mystery: O the Depth of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God! O what reason have

we with Job to abhor our selves, and to repent in Dust and Ashes, because, like him, in our Disputes with our Friends, concerning the Reasons and Methods of God's Proceedings, we have dark-

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self by Words without Knowledge, and have not
 that which we understood not, things too won-
 derful for us.
 Perhaps it was something below us, not worth
 disputing about, especially with so much Warmth
 and Violence: 'Twas a Trifle, a meer Strife of 1 Tim. 6. 4.
 words, a Dispute de lana caprina, as if the Matter
 started only for want of something to wran-
 gle about; so inconsiderable a thing, that which way
 it goes, the Costs are much more than the
 damage. In the Reflection we may justly blush
 to think that we should make so much ado, so
 great a Noise about nothing.
 Perhaps it was something foreign to us, that
 we were no way concern'd in; some Matter of
 sticks it may be, which belongs not to those of
 our Rank and Station, but must be left to wiser
 heads, whose Business it is to deal in things of that
 nature. Our Lord Jesus after his Resurrection
 check'd his Disciples for a vain Curiosity,
 in enquiring concerning one another's Af-
 fairs, when Peter ask'd concerning John, What John 21. 22.
 will this Man do? Christ answer'd him, What's
 to thee? Follow thou me. And another time in
 enquiring concerning God's Counsels, It is not for Acts 1. 7.
 us to know the Times or the Seasons.
 Perhaps it was something indifferent, like the
 controversy among the Primitive Christians con- Rom. 14. 2,
 cerning the observing of Days, and making a Di-
 vision of Meats, which the Apostle himself doth
 not think fit to determine, but leaves each side to
 decide according as their Judgment was, with-
 out imposing upon either, since they might be of
 different Mind, and yet be accepted of God, only for-
 bidding them to fall out about it, or to despise, or
 despise one another.
 (2.) Upon account of our Management of
 Disputes. When our Disputes among our selves by the
 sons of come to be review'd, it will be found that
 much Mischief was done not by the things themselves,
 con-

concerning which we differ'd, but by our Mismatchment of the Controversy.

Our Master will be displeas'd with us if it be found that we have been hot and fierce in our Disputes, and have mingled our Passions and peevish Resentments with them; If a *Point of Honour* hath govern'd us more than a *Point of Conscience*, and we have contended more for Victory and Reputation than for Truth and Duty; If we have contended about things of small moment for or against them, and have neglected the weighty Matters of the Law and Gospel; If we have spent more of our Zeal on Matters in Difference than they deserve, and have lost the Vitals of Religion in our Heat about Circumstantialities, and have disputed away our Seriousness and Devotion, *what then shall we do when God riseth up, and when he visiteth, what shall we answer him?*

If in our Disputes for the Truth we lie against the Truth, and *speak deceitfully for God*, the good Intention will be so far from justifying the Lie, that the Lie will condemn the good Intention, and convict it of Hypocrisie; for if the Intention were *really good*, such a Practice would be *abhor'd*. If we have the *Itch of Disputing*, and a Spirit of Contradiction, that is certainly one of those foolish hurtful Lusts, *from whence come Wars and Fightings*. If we receive our Brethren that are weak to doubtful Disputations, and lead them to perplex and puzzle them, and run them to ground with Objections against what they do we believe, it shews a great Contempt both of the Truth, and of their Souls, and is a jest with both. If we judge and censure and condemn our Brethren that are not in every thing of our Mind, and tho' we call our selves *Disciples*, set up for *Masters*, many *Masters*, if we give reproachful Language, and call *foul Names*, which commonly betrays the Weakness of our Cause, and is *ingloriously* press'd into the Service

Job 31. 14.

Rom. 14. 1.

James 3. 1.

make up the Deficiency of Argument, we shall
 ve a great deal to answer for, when all our
 disputes will be call'd over again by our Master.
 2. Many Disputes arise from *separate and*
conflicting Interests in this World. Neighbours
 and Relations quarrel about their Rights and
 Properties, their Estates and Trades, their Ho-
 nours and Powers and Pleasures; *Meum* and
uum are the Great Subject of Dispute, and en-
 ge People in endless Strifes. The first Dispute
 read of in the Primitive Church was about
 Money-Matter: The Grecians quarrell'd
 with the Hebrews *because they thought their*
temporal Affairs were neglected in the daily Ministrations. Acts 6. 1.
 Many Disputes of this Kind happen, which will
 inquir'd into as well as those about Diffe-
 rences in Opinion, and therefore it concerns us
 to reflect upon them, that whatever we find to
 have been amiss in them may be repented of, we
 may in *godly sorrow* quarrel with *our selves*, and
 not, for our *unjust* unbecoming Quarrels with
 Brethren.
 Ask then, what was it that you disputed a-
 bout with such a Neighbour, such a Friend, at
 such a time; perhaps you *disputed* that which
 you ought to have yielded without Dispute, a
 Debt, or a rightful Possession, which you
 ought to have carry'd, by Dint of Opposition,
 against Equity. Perhaps you disputed about
 something very trivial, and of small Value,
 which was not worth controverting, but which,
 if the right were indeed of your Side, you might
 have receded from it for Peace-sake, without any
 detriment to your selves or Families. Perhaps
 the Dispute might have been *prevented*, or when
 it was began, might *quickly and easily* have been
 accommodated with a little Wisdom and Love;
 as the Strife between *Abraham* and *Lot* was soon Gen. 13. 8, 9.
 ended, and the Matter compromis'd by *Abra-*
 ham's prudent Condescension. A little *yielding*
 would

Disputes Review'd.

would pacify great Offences, and put an effect Stop to that threatening Mischief which sometimes a little Fire kindles.

Review your *Law-Suits*, and it may be will find, that how stiff soever you were in Heat of the Prosecution of them, your common Thoughts tell you they were not manag'd as comes Christians; you did not try to end things you ought to have done in an amicable Way; perhaps they were begun rashly, and in Passion, then no wonder if they be carried on unreasonably and that which was a hasty sudden Passion the Beginning of the Quarrel, is in Danger of ripening into a rooted Malice before the End. And they who at first pretended that they desired only to right themselves, at length, as their resentments have grown more and more keen, are not ashamed to own that they are resolv'd to revenge themselves.

These Disputes, as they are most common, they are most scandalous among Relations, those who are under particular Obligation to love one another; and whatever it is that keeps Brethren from dwelling together in Unity, is contrary provoking to Christ, who hath made Brotherly Love the Livery of his Family; And it is hardly removed; for a Brother offended is harder to be won than a strong City, and their Contentions are as the Door of a Castle; witness Jacob and Esau.

3. Some Disputes, and hot ones too, arise naturally from Passion and clashing Humours, where really there is nothing of Judgment or Integrity in the Cause. Some indulge themselves in a Crossness of Temper that makes them continually uneasy to their Relations, the nearest, dearest, and to all about them. They love to thwart and disagree, and to dispute every thing, tho' never so plain, or never so trifling. They make their Lives, and the Relations wherein

uncomfortable by this, especially when both are of such a Spirit; One will have their *own*, their *Saying*, and the other will have *its*, and so they are ever and anon disputing, and shall be *greatest*, and instead of aiming to please, are contriving to *displease* and *contradict* another.

But do such consider that they must give an account to Christ for all these *Disputes among themselves by the Way*, that they will all be call'd in again? How ill doth it become the *Disciples* and Followers of the *humble Jesus* to carry on with a high Hand, imperiously and with a high Spirit towards their inferiour Relations, not allowing them to speak for themselves, nor willing to hear reason from them! How ill doth it become the Worshipers of the *God of Love* to be so *harsh* and *spiteful* and *ill-natur'd*, and quarrelling with all they have any Dealings with! The Father of the Prodigal, when his Elder Son was in a *Humour, angry, and would not come in*, did dispute with him, *chide him and threaten him*, Luke 15. 28. he very well deserv'd it, but he *went out and* *reprov'd him*, spoke him fair, and so brought him into good Temper again, which is written in our Learning, that we may go and *do likewise*, but withal for our Shame that we have *not* so. By the Account which the Scripture gives of some peevish passionate Disputes, it appears that Notice is taken of the Height to which the Ferment of the Spirit riseth at such a Time; as in the Men of Ephraim quarrell'd with Gideon Judg. 8. 1. at a Point of Honour, it is left upon Record, that they did *chide with him sharply*, tho' by his exemplary Mildness, as well as by his eminent Abilities, he deserv'd better at their Hands—— as in a like Case, Judah and Israel fell out, and observ'd that *the Words of the Men of Judah* 2 Sam. 19. 43. *were fiercer than the Words of the Men of Israel*. If it be so indeed, that an Account is kept

Disputes Review'd.

of the Sharpness of our Chiding, and the Fierceness of our Words, we are concern'd by true Repentance to *judge our selves* for it, that we may not be *judged of the Lord*.

And whatever we find has been amiss in Disputes of any kind, let it be amended for future.

1. As far as we are able to make a Judgment let us see to it *that we have Truth and Right on Side, in all our Disputes*, and not be confident a further than we see *just Cause* to be so. We must not only never contend for that which we know to be false and wrong, but not for that which is doubtful, or which we do not know to be true and right. Let us never wrong our Consciences in any of our Contests, nor say we believe that to be true, and therefore dispute for it, which really we do not believe to be so, nor demand that of our own, which we know or have Reason to suspect we have no good Title to, nor deny that to be another which we cannot but think is just his.

And if in the Progress of any Dispute or Controversie, it be made to appear to us, at length that we were *mistaken*, and in the Wrong, must be ready to *acknowledge* it, thankful to those that have *discover'd* it to us, and not ashamed *let fall* the Controversy: And we have a great Notion of Honour, if we think this will be a real Disparagement to us, for certainly St. Paul shewed more true Courage, and merited more true Praise, when he said, *I can do nothing against the Truth*, than Goliath did when he *defy'd* all the Armies of Israel.

2. In *Matters of doubtful Disputation*, where we are contending for that which we take to be right, let us at the same Time *think it possible we may be in the wrong*. When we contend for the great Principles of Religion, in which good Christians are agreed, we need not fear

ing in a Mistake, they are of undoubted Certainty, we know and are sure that Jesus is the Christ. But there are many things that are not so clearly reveal'd, because not of so much Moment, in which the Truth indeed lies but on one Side, and yet wise and good Men are not agreed on which Side it lies; Here, tho' we both *argue*, and *act* according to the Light that God has given us, yet we must not be over-confident of our own Judgment, as if *Wisdom* must die with us; others Job 12. 2, 3. have Understanding as well as we, and are not inferior to us; nay, perhaps they every way excel us, and therefore who can tell but they may be in the right? However they *argue* and *act* according to the Light they have, which we ought to pay a Defectance to, so as not to condemn all those for *Weak Men*, or *ill Men*, that are not in every thing of our *Mind*, and will not say as we say—*Job* in dispute is not unwilling to put the Case, *It is indeed that I have erred.* Job 19. 4.

In Matters of Fact on which Right depends, it is possible we may be mistaken; *Humanum est errare.* Words may be misunderstood and misapprehended, and the wisest and most cautious and observing may be guilty of an *Over-sight*, and may forget something that would very much alter the Case, and therefore it will be no Credit to our Wisdom and Goodness to be too *positive*, too *peremptory*, as long as there is a Possibility of our being deceived. Never let our Assertions go beyond our Assurances, nor let us give that as certain and great, which was given us as doubtful and little, but be very wary in what we maintain, not only for our Reputation's Sake, lest our Neighbour search us and put us to Shame, but for Conscience-sake, towards God, who hates a proud Look, and a lying Tongue, two very ill Prov. 6. 17. Things that commonly go together, to support one another.

Disputes Review'd.

3. Let us keep the full Possession and Government of our own Spirits in all our Disputes. Let us carefully suppress all inward Tumults, whatever vocation may be given us, and let our Minds be calm and sedate, whatever Argument we are engag'd in. Let no Contradiction put us in Heat or Disorder; for when *Passion* is up we are not so capable as we ought to be either to Reason or to speak it, nor is it likely we should either convince or be convinc'd of Truth and Right. Meekness and Quietness of Spirit do as much for a Cause as they are the Beauty and Ornament of its Advocates.

If we contend for that which is wrong, the more passionate we are, the greater is the Sin of Contention, and the more there is of the Image of the Devil upon it, who is not only the Father of Lies and Falshood, but a Red Dragon and a roaring Lion. But if we have Truth and Right on our Side, that needs no intemperate Heats and Passions for the Support of it, nor can have any real Service done it by them. The Cause of Heaven can never be pleaded with any Credit or Success by a Tongue set on Fire of Hell.

- James I. 20. Wrath of Man works not the Righteousness of God. Parties may be serv'd by Fury and Violence, but the Common Interests of Pure Christianity will certainly be prejudic'd by it. Christ was therefore fit to teach us, and we are invited to come and learn of him; it is not said because in him were hid all the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge, tho' that is certainly true, but because he is meek and lowly in Heart, and can have Compassion on the ignorant, and herein all that undertake to instruct others, must study to imitate him. And this is the likeliest Way to gain our Point, if indeed we be in the right, for the Words of the Wise are heard in quiet, more than the Cry of him that rules among Fools.
- Mat. II. 29. Be ye also lowly in Heart, and can have Compassion on the ignorant, and herein all that undertake to instruct others, must study to imitate him. And this is the likeliest Way to gain our Point, if indeed we be in the right, for the Words of the Wise are heard in quiet, more than the Cry of him that rules among Fools.
- Eccl. 9. 18. The words of the Wise are heard in quiet, more than the Cry of him that rules among Fools.

4. Let us have for our guide the Gospel, and not violate its precepts. Let us forefaw the consequences of our words, and would set much Dissent requisite to much the cause thereof. These Disputes are not Laws that we must follow, but Family, and his Disciples. Let us ourselves understand the sense of the Gospel, and purchas'd Charity. Let us be upon our Flock, with the living Accusation, the Right on the contrary, and contend with the adversary. Let us more out of it. Let us Mens Words not digging in, joining in, and the private Matters and Misdemeanors than it is on one side.

4. Let us never lose the Charity we ought to have for our Brethren in our Disputes of any kind, nor violate the sacred Laws of it. Our Lord Jesus foresaw and foretold that the Preaching of his Gospel would occasion much Division, that it *Luke 12. 51.* would set Men at variance, and be the Subject of much Dispute: And therefore he thought it very requisite to bind the Command of mutual Love so much the more strongly upon his Followers, because there was danger lest that should be lost in these Disputes: He makes it one of the fundamental Laws of his Kingdom, the new Commandment, that we love one another; and the Livery of his Family, by which all Men might know who are his Disciples. See how these Christians love one another.

Let us therefore in all our Disputes keep our selves under the commanding Power and Influence of Holy Love; for that Victory is dearly purchas'd, that is got at the Expence of Christian Charity. Let us honour all Men, and not trample upon any, nor set those among the Dogs of our Flock, whom for ought we know Christ hath set with the Lambs of his. Let us never bring a railing Accusation against any. Michael the Arch-Angel, tho' he was sure in the Dispute he had Right on his side, and the Glory of God was nearly concern'd, and it was with the Devil that he contended, yet he would not thus attack his Adversary. The Scourge of the Tongue hath driven more out of the Temple, than ever it drove into it. Let us always put the best Construction on Mens Words and Actions that they will bear, not digging up Mischief, as evil Men do, nor rejoicing in Iniquity, but rejoicing in the Truth, hoping the best as far as we can. Let us not aggravate Matters in variance, nor by strain'd Innuendo's and Misrepresentations make either side worse than it is; for that's a Method which may harden one side, but can never convince the other, nor can

can be us'd with any other Design but to make the contending Parties *hate one another*; And whose Kingdom that serves the Interests of, 'tis easy to say, not Christ's I am sure. Let us not judge of *Mens spiritual and Eternal State*, and send Men to Hell presently as Reprobates, because they are not in every thing of our *Mind* or cannot fall in with our *Measures*. They that do so usurp a Divine Prerogative, take the *Keys of Hell and Death* out of the Hands of Christ, and shew themselves to be as destitute of the Fear of God, as they are of Love to their Neighbour.

5. Let us often think of *the Account* we must shortly give to our *Great Master* of all our *Disputes* with our Fellow-servants *by the Way*. Let us consider how our *Disputes* will look in that Day and what our own *Reflections* will be then upon them. When the Apostle asks, *Where is the Disputer of this World?* Perhaps (saith the Excellent Archbishop Tillotson) he intends to insinuate "That the wrangling Work of Disputation has place only in this World, and upon this Earth," "where only there is a Dust to be rais'd; but," "will have no place in the other, where all things will be clear, and past Dispute: And," "saith he) a good Man would be loth to be taken out of the World reeking hot from sharp Contention with a perverse Adversary," "and not a little out of countenance to find himself in this Temper translated into the calm and peaceable Regions of the Blessed," "where nothing but perfect Charity and Good Will reign for ever."

Phil. 4. 5. Let our *Moderation* therefore be known unto all Men, Moderation in all *Disputes*, because our Lord is at hand, nor let us grudge one against another, because the *Judge* standeth before the Door, and we may tremble to think what our Doom will be, if we be found *smiting* our *Fellow-Servants*; and how we shall answer it, if it be proved upon

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upon us, who have had so much forgiven us by our Master, that for a small matter we have taken them by the Throat. But seeing we look for a Day of Account, in which there will be a Review of Disputes, let us give Diligence, that we may be found of Christ in Peace. When Job and his Friends had maintain'd a long Dispute, in which many hasty peevish Words were exchang'd, God at length interpos'd as Moderator, and gave Judgment upon the Debate, that they were all to be blam'd, and had taken a great deal of Pains (as most Disputants do) to make work for Repentance; and therefore the contending Parties must ask Pardon of God and one another, must forgive and forget, and live in love for the future. And this is the best End of Controversies, happy were it if they were all brought to this Issue now; for to this Issue all the Controversies that are among Good Men will be brought at last, when they shall meet in the World of everlasting Light and Love.

For the Fourth. Of all Disputes Christ will be sure to reckon with his Disciples for their Disputes about Precedency and Superiority; that was the Dispute here, *Who should be greatest*: And Christ doth not determine the Matter, as it might justly be expected he should have done, if he had intended that Peter, or any other of them, should have a Primacy and Supremacy above the rest; no, he is displeas'd with them for starting such a Question, and disputing about it, because it was an Indication that they all aim'd at being great in the World; and were ambitious of it, and whenever Preferments were to be had, they would quarrel among themselves, which should get the best; notwithstanding the Meanness of their first Education, when they were bred Fishermen, which might have done something to curb aspiring Thoughts; and the Goodness of their late Education,

tion, when they were train'd up to be *Apostles* which might have done *much more*.

Now there are five Reasons why this Disposition of theirs was very displeasing to our Lord Jesus.

1. Because it came from a mistaken Notion of *Kingdom*, which they had learn'd at the Feet of their Scribes, and had not yet unlearn'd, tho' they had sate so long at Christ's Feet, so hard is it to conquer the Power of Prejudice. The Jews *misunderstanding* many of the Prophecies of the Old Testament, which spake of the *Messiah* and *Kingdom*, expected him to appear in *external Pomp and Splendor*, and to exercise a temporal Jurisdiction, to break the *Roman Yoke* from their Necks, and give them Dominion over their neighbour Nations. The Disciples had suck'd this Notion with their Milk, and did *imagine* (as they should seem by many Instances) that our Lord Jesus, tho' he appear'd meanly at first, would in a little time bring it to this, and that this was the *Kingdom of Heaven*, which they were to possess as at hand : And this they had an eye to when they strove *who should be the greatest*.

Now this was a great Mistake ; and the constant Tenor and Tendency of Christ's Life and Doctrine might have convinc'd them that it was so ; that Christ's Kingdom was *not* to be of this *World*, but was intended to be all spiritual, the Laws and Powers of it, the Rewards and Punishments of it all spiritual, the Weapons of our Warfare *not carnal* ; that the Messiah was to rule by his Spirit in the Spirits of Men : The Design it was to refine Men from the Dross and Dregs of Worldliness and Sensuality, and to raise them up to a holy, heavenly, spiritual and divine Life, and to teach them to look down upon all earthly things with a *gracious and generous Contempt* such as this was the Constitution and Comple-

John 18. 36.

of Christ's Kingdom, and therefore it could not be *displeasing* to him, for them to *dote* on *Greatness*.
 Because it was *directly contrary* to the two *Lessons* of his School, and *Laws* of his Kingdom, *Humility* and *Love*. It is against the Law of *Humility* to covet to be *great* in this World, against the Law of *Love* to strive who shall be *greatest*. Had not Christ taught them both *Lessons*, both by *Precept* and by *Example*? He not made it the first Condition of Discipleship, that *whosoever would come after him* must *deny himself*? Doth not the great Law of Love *urge us in Honour to prefer one another*, and to *place* to our Brethren? What *unapt* Scholars then were they who had not learn'd such *plain and needful* Lessons as these! How well is it *imagined* that we have a kind Master, who doth not *drive out* of his School dull Scholars, but gives *his Spirit to open their Understandings*, and *things to their Remembrance*.
 When we are *eager* in our Pursuits of the *World*, and *seek and aim* at *great things* in it; when we are *quarrelsome* with our Brethren, and *run out* into Indecencies by our *Contests* and *Strife*, let us think how *unbecoming* Christians this, how *contrary* we walk to the *Laws* of the *Holy Religion* we make profession of: And can we *glory* in the Honour of it? can we with *confidence* plead the Promises of it, or *please* ourselves with the Privileges of it, or *feed* our *Hearts* with the Hopes of it, when we have so little regard to the *Precepts* of it? Will those be *willing* to lose their Lives for their Religion, that *cannot* deny themselves the Gratification of a *filthy Lust* or *Passion* for it?
 Because it was *utterly disagreeable* to the *Example* which *Jesus Christ himself* had set them, and the *Copy* he had given them to write after. The *Word of Command* which he gave them
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when he call'd them to be his Disciples, *Follow me; Do as you see me do: But when they were disputing who should be greatest, and setting up a Title to worldly Pomp and Power, they were far from resembling him, who was among them as one that served, and came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.* The same Manner should have been in them, that was in him, who was so great an Example of Humility and Low Condescension and Affection, who *emptied himself, and made himself of no Reputation; who was only in the general Scheme of his Undertaking, but in the particular Passages of his Life, gave such Instances of Self-denial, as justly are the Wonder of Angels, who to teach them this Lesson, and oblige them to learn it with this View, Argument, not long after this, wash'd their Feet, and bid them do as he had done; could the Followers of such a Master contend for Precedence, and not blush at the Reflection upon their own Folly and Unworthiness.*

Luke 22. 27.

Mat. 20. 28.

Phil. 2. 5.

John 13.

1—15.

Let us *shame our selves* out of our Pride, Ambition, and Affectation of worldly Honour, and inordinate Pursuit of worldly Wealth, with Consideration: Shall I set my Heart upon things which my Master was *dead to, and deny'd him* in, and for *my sake* too? Am I not a Christian, a Follower of Christ! I must then either change my Name, or recover a better Temper. *Our Master I not to walk in the same Spirit, in the same Stead.*

4. Because it would render them very unfit for the Services which he had appointed them to. It is very absurd for them to strive who should be greatest, who should live most at ease, and most in freedom, who should have the most Power and the largest Command, when they were all to labour, and suffer Reproach, to live in Meanness and Poverty, to be loaded with Disgrace and Ignominy, and counted as the Off-scouring of all things; nay, to be kill'd all the Day long, and devoted to Death.

1 Tim. 4. 10.

Sheep to the Slaughter, and rul'd with Rigour :
 such Dispositions and Expectations as these would
 but a bad Preparative for Sufferings. They
 would approve themselves good Soldiers of
 Christ must endure Hardness, and not affect 2 Tim. 2. 3.
 Hardness.

And therefore tho' this Indisposition, and the
 mistake it was groundd upon, seems by many
 instances after this to have continued as long as
 they had Christ's bodily Presence with them ; yet
 before they launch'd out into the Deep of their Ser-
 vice, they were perfectly cur'd of it, by the pour-
 ing out of the Spirit upon them, after which we
 are them no more dreaming of a Temporal
 Kingdom, nor striving who should be greatest ; for
 those whom God designs to imploy in any Ser-
 vice for him, he will either find them fit, or make
 them so : And as the Day, so shall the Strength, so
 shall the Spirit be. And if we would be ready
 to do all the Will of God, and stand compleat in
 it, so as not to be driven from our Work by the
 Difficulties we may meet in it, we must be dead
 to worldly Wealth and Grandeur, and live a-
 void of them, as those that look beyond them.

Because it was a corrupt Temper that would
 do more than any thing the Bane of the Church in
 former times ; would be the Reproach of its Mini-
 stry, an Obstruction to its Enlargement, the Distur-
 bance of its Peace, and the Original of all the
 Schisms that would be made upon its Order and
 Unity. Our Saviour foresaw this, and therefore
 took all Occasions to check and repress it in his
 Disciples, for warning to all others ; that all who
 are called by his Name, and profess Relation to
 him, may be jealous over themselves with a godly
 jealousy, and may look diligently lest this Root of Heb. 12. 15.
 Bitterness spring up and trouble both themselves
 and others, and thereby many be defil'd and
 disturb'd.

3 John. 9.

2 Thef. 2. 4.

Ila. 32. 15.

When we see how early in the Primitive Times the *Mystery of Iniquity* began to work Strifes among Ministers, who should be greatest, Diotrephes, who lov'd to have the Preheminence and in the *Man of Sin*, who, by Degrees, under the Influence of this Principle, came to usurp a Universal Headship, and to exalt himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped. Let us see with what good Reason Christ so often cation'd his Disciples against this, and lament the Mischief that is done by it to the Church. It must needs be that such Offences would come; as we are told of them before, that we may not be stumbled at them, but woe to those by whom they do come. The Prevalency of such a Temper as this, as far as it appears, is very threatening. But when the Spirit shall be poured out upon us from on high, there shall be no more such Disputes as these, and then the Wilderness shall become a fruitful Field.

Upon the whole Matter, therefore, Let our Strife be who shall be best, not who shall be greatest.

1. Let us never strive who shall be greatest in this World, who shall have the best Preferment, who shall be Master of the best Estate, or make the best Figure, but acquiesce in the Lot Providence carves out to us, not aiming at great things, but striving for them.

Consider what worldly Greatness is:

(1) What a despicable thing it is to those that have their Eye upon another World. All that Faith have seen the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ, that are acquainted with the Grandeur of the upper and better World, and are conversant with that World, have laid up their Treasure in it, and set their Hearts upon it, and hope shortly to share in the Enjoyments of it: what a poor thing are the Poms and Pleasures of this World to them! how easily can they win

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Vanity upon them! for they know *better Things*: What's Purple, and Scarlet, and fine Linnen, and faring sumptuously every Day, to one that's cloth'd with the *Robes of Righteousness* and *Garments of Salvation*, and has a continual Feast upon the Promises of the New Covenant? What are Titles of Honour, or splendid Attendance, to one that is call'd a Friend of God, and, about whom the Holy Angels encamp? What are the fading withering Glories of Time, in comparison with the *far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory* that is to be reveal'd. Let us be alham'd then to strive, or *seem to strive*, for that which, if we act as becomes our Character, we cannot but look upon with a holy Contempt and Indifferency.

(2) What a *dangerous thing* this worldly Greatness is to *those* that have not their Eyes upon another World, how apt it is to draw their Hearts away from God, and from the Consideration and Pursuit of a future Blessedness, and to fix them to this World, and make them willing to take up with a Portion in it; And especially what a *strong Temptation* it is to *break through* all the sacred Fences of the Divine Law to compass it. The Devil would not have tempted Christ to worship him, with a Promise of *all the Kingdoms of the World, and the Glory of them*, but that he had caught many a one with that Bait. As they that will be rich, 1 Tim. 6. 9. so they that will be great, and cannot think themselves happy, unless they be, *fall into Temptation, and a Snare, and into many foolish and hurtful Lusts*. Let us therefore never court our own Trouble, nor covet to enter into Temptation, as they do, who, when they are as great as God saw fit to make 'em, yet are still aiming to be greater, and striving to be greatest.

2. Let all our Strife be *who shall be best*, not disputing *who has been best*, that's a vain-glorious Strife, but humbly contending *who shall be so*; who

who shall be most humble, and stoop lowest, for the Good of others, and who shall labour most for the Common Welfare. This is a gracious Strife; a Strife that will pass well in our Account when all our Disputes will be review'd. If we
 1 Cor. 12. ult. will *covet*, let us *covet earnestly the best Gifts*, covet to be rich in Faith, and rich in good Works; I
 2 Cor. 5. 9. we will be *ambitious*, let it be the Top of our Ambition to do good, and therein *to be accepted of the Lord*. If we will *aim to excel*, let it be in that which is virtuous and praise-worthy, and in a holy Zeal for the Honour of God, and the Advancement of the true Interests of Christ's Kingdom.

Herein let us strive to *excel others*, and to do more good *than they do*, not that we may have the Praise of it, but that God may have the Glory of it, and that we may *provoke others to Love and to good Works*; not that we may be *many Masters*, but that we may make our selves *Servants of all*. Let us *go before in Zeal*, and yet be willing to *come behind in Humility and Self-denial*; do better than others, and yet, in Love and Lowliness of Mind, *esteem others better than our selves*.
 Heb. 10. 24. Phil. 2. 3.

But especially let us strive to *excel our selves*, and to do more good *than we have done*. Let it be a constant *Dispute* with our own Souls, why we do not lay out our selves more for God. And when we *remember the Kindness of our Youth*, and the Love of our *Esponsals*, instead of leaving that *first Love*, and cooling in it, let our *advanced Years* contend earnestly to excel our *early ones*, that our *last Days* may be our *best Days*, and our *last Works* our *best Works*. Forgetting the Things which are behind, let us still *press forward towards Perfection*, *press forward towards the Mark*, for the *Prize of the High Calling*, that at length we may have not only an Entrance, but an *abundant Entrance* ministred to us into the *Everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*.
 Phil. 3. 13, 14. 1 Pet. 1. 11.



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